

Revised Definition of “Conference”

2.4.1 Definition. For purposes of this policy, the term "conference" means a “meeting, retreat, seminar, symposium or event that involves attendee travel.” See the Federal Travel Regulations (FTR), 41 CFR 300-3.1.¹

2.4.2 Exclusions. This section identifies the types of meetings or events that are not considered conferences for the purposes of this policy:

2.4.2.1 Operational Meeting. The term conference does not include Mission (Operational) meetings.

Mission (Operational) Meeting is a meeting necessary to perform agency managerial or operational activities, as part of day-to-day operations. For purposes of this policy, there are two types of Operational Meetings:

2.4.2.1.1 Formal Operational Meeting. These are Operational Meetings required under a NASA Policy Directive (NPD) or Procedural Requirement (NPR) for governance or project management purposes.

- a. Governance meeting A meeting held for Agency governance by one of the Councils or Advisory Committees set forth in NPD 1000.3.
- b. Program and Project Management Meeting A meeting required for program and project oversight, planning, review and approval. Examples of these include meetings of the oversight bodies and reviews set forth in NASA’s project management NPRs (NPR 7120.5, NPR 7120.7, and NPR 7120.8), program readiness reviews like NPD 8610.24 (pre-launch readiness reviews). Also included are meetings with the Executive Office of the President or Congress.

2.4.2.1.2 Other Operational Meetings. These are meetings, other than Formal Operational Meetings, held in furtherance of NASA’s missions and operations. Other Operational Meetings include the following (but exclude meetings under one of the Special Cases in section 2.4.2.1.3):

- a. Other Programmatic and Institutional Meeting: meeting necessary for NASA management or operational activities as part of routine Agency business. Included are activities such as project planning and prioritizations, project development work or operations, property management, reviews, audits, investigations, and inspections.
- b. Interagency Meetings A meeting with officials of another governmental agency (federal, state, local or international), onsite at a governmental agency facility, on mission or operational matters of mutual interest to NASA and the other governmental agency, such as hearings, technical coordination, joint operations, or programmatic planning.

2.4.2.1.3 Special Cases. There is an inevitable overlap between the terms “operational meeting” and “conference” as used in the FTR. Notwithstanding the operational focus of Other Operational Meetings under sections 2.4.2.1.2, they can take on the indicia of a “conference” depending on how the events are structured.² To the extent an event meets the following criteria, it will be considered and reported as a conference.

¹ This definition is from the Federal Travel Regulations, 41 C.F.R. 300-3.1. The exclusions in section 2 are based on FTR sec. 301 App. C. Both the FTR and OMB M-12-12 recognize there is an overlap between the term “conference” and terms like “training,” but unlike the FTR, OMB M-12-12 requires reporting of all conference costs regardless of its additional purpose as training. In view of this, the scope of section 2.4.2 has been narrowed to exclude activities that might be reasonably considered “conferences” in terms of usage under the FTR.

² While conferences may take on many forms, recognized indicia of a formal conference include (1) participants from multiple agencies or organizations, (2) discussions involving topical matters of interest to the participants, (3) scheduled speakers or discussion panels, (4) published substantive agenda, and (5) registration. Note that

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- a. Open Participation at an Onsite Meeting—where NASA sponsors a meeting at one of its facilities with multiple speakers that is open to external participants (i.e., persons other than those working directly for or with NASA on the missions or programs being discussed), and the purpose of the meeting is to promote general awareness or to disseminate or exchange information about NASA missions or programs with all of the participants. This does not include news events, such as press conferences and launch viewings, coordinated by the Office of Communications to announce research results, mission milestones, annual budget releases, and the like to Congress or the media.
- b. Large Offsite Meetings—where NASA pays for a rented facility to host an offsite meeting to accommodate more than 30 participants³. This does not apply to events held at the facility of NASA’s contractor, an agreement partner, or a grantee when the subject of the meeting focuses on the work the entity is performing.
- c. Another Agency Conference—where NASA is informed by another U.S. Government agency that a meeting that agency is hosting is considered “conference” under OMB M-12-12, NASA will also treat that agency’s event as “conference.”

2.4.2.2. Training. The term "training" is defined in the Government Employees Training Act, U.S.C. 4101, as “planned, prepared, and coordinated program, course, curriculum, subject, system, or routine of instruction or education in scientific, professional, technical, mechanical, trade, clerical, fiscal, administrative, or other fields intended to improve individual and organizational performance and assist in achieving the Agency's mission and performance goals.” The implementing regulations distinguish between other forms of training and training at a conference. See C.F.R. 410.101 et seq. Examples of non-conference training include “classroom training, on-the-job training, technology-based training, satellite training, [individual] coaching, mentoring, career development counseling, details, rotational assignments [and] cross training.” 5 C.F.R. 410.203. These are not reported within the meaning of “conference.” In contrast, where an event otherwise meets the definition of a conference, it should be reported as such, regardless of whether some portion of the activities qualifies as “training.”

2.4.2.3. Special Agency Mission. This includes unique activities outside NASA’s normal course of day-to-day business. Examples include reimbursable details, security missions, and agency emergency response/recovery.

most federal agencies lack the authority to charge registration, so this last indicia does not apply to conferences they sponsor. But, to the extent there is a substantive agenda with discussions on topical matters, with multi-entity participation, it is more likely that reasonable persons would consider such an event a conference, notwithstanding strong programmatic content.

³ Offices are encouraged to carefully review the justification for renting offsite facilities for meetings. However, small meetings typically do not meet the indicia of a formal conference, and a 30-person event is recognized in the FTR as the threshold for requiring more formal conference site comparisons and records.